

World War II and the Transformation of Mizo Society: A New Historicist Reading of Selected Mizo Novels

Vanlaltana Kiangte

Research Scholar, Mizo Department, Mizoram University, Supervisor/ Professor
Laltluangliana Kiangte, Mizoram University

Article Received: 05/06/2026

Article Accepted: 08/07/2026

Published Online: 09/07/2026

DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.07.241

Abstract:

The Second World War profoundly transformed Mizoram, bringing significant economic, social, and political changes that reshaped the lives of the Mizo people. Although historians have documented many aspects of the war, relatively little attention has been given to how Mizo novels interpret these historical experiences. This article applies New Historicism to examine the representation of wartime transformation in five selected Mizo novels: *Maymyo Sanapui* (1946), *Irrawady Lui Kamah* (1982), *Zawlpala Thlan Tlang* (1983), *Ka Hmangaih Tlat Che* (1991), and *Awi Ka Rei Lucknow* (1997). Drawing on Louis Montrose's concept of the "historicity of texts and the textuality of history," the study reads these novels alongside memoirs, historical records, missionary writings, and government documents. It argues that the novels do more than recount historical events; they reinterpret colonial rule, preserve indigenous memories, and construct alternative understandings of wartime Mizoram. The study finds that World War II accelerated the transition to a cash economy, altered social hierarchies through military service, expanded educational and political awareness, and contributed to the emergence of modern Mizo identity. By reading literary and historical texts together, the article demonstrates that Mizo novels function not only as literary works but also as valuable historical discourses that preserve the collective memory of the Second World War.

Keywords: New Historicism, World War II, Mizoram, Mizo novels, colonialism, social transformation.

Introduction

The Second World War (1939–1945) was a watershed in the history of modern Mizoram. Although the Lushai Hills did not become a major battlefield, the war brought unprecedented economic, social, and political changes to the region. Military recruitment, road construction, wartime administration, expanding monetary circulation, and increased

contact with people from different parts of India and the wider world transformed everyday life in ways that continued to shape Mizo society long after the war had ended.

The impact of the war on Mizoram has been widely documented in memoirs, historical writings, and official records. These sources provide valuable information on military activities, administrative policies, transportation, education, and missionary work during the wartime period. However, they often emphasise institutional and political developments while giving comparatively less attention to the experiences of ordinary people. Literary texts, particularly novels, preserve these neglected dimensions by recording personal memories, emotional responses, and changing social relationships. They therefore offer an important perspective for understanding how wartime transformation was experienced and remembered within Mizo society.

This study examines five Mizo novels that depict different aspects of the Second World War: Capt. C. Khuma's *Maymyo Sanapui* (1946), James Dokhuma's *Irrawady Lui Kamah* (1982), Khawlkungi's *Zawlpala Thlan Tlang* (1983), Lalruali's *Ka Hmangaih Tlat Che* (1991), and Capt. L. Z. Sailo's *Awi Ka Rei Lucknow* (1997). Although published over a period of five decades, these novels collectively portray military service, civilian hardship, economic change, political awakening, and the emergence of new social values. Rather than treating them simply as fictional narratives, this article reads them as cultural texts that participate in the construction of historical meaning.

The article adopts New Historicism as its theoretical framework. Developed primarily through the work of Stephen Greenblatt, New Historicism argues that literary texts and historical documents are produced within the same cultural and ideological contexts and therefore should be read together rather than separately. As Louis Montrose observes, New Historicism is concerned with the "historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (20). In other words, literature is shaped by history, while history itself is known only through texts that are influenced by particular perspectives and cultural conditions. This approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between literature and historical reality.

Accordingly, this article reads the selected novels alongside memoirs, government reports, missionary writings, and other historical sources relating to wartime Mizoram. It argues that these novels are not merely fictional representations of the past but important historical discourses that reinterpret colonial rule through indigenous Mizo experiences. By placing literary texts within their historical context, the study demonstrates how World War II transformed Mizo society economically, socially, and politically, while also revealing the vital role of literature in preserving and reshaping the collective memory of wartime Mizoram.

Despite the growing body of historical scholarship on wartime Mizoram, little attention has been paid to how Mizo novels reconstruct these historical experiences through the lens of New Historicism. This article seeks to address that gap.

Theoretical Framework: Reading History and Fiction through New Historicism

New Historicism emerged in the 1980s as an influential approach to literary criticism through the work of Stephen Greenblatt and other scholars. Rejecting the traditional separation of literature and history, New Historicists argue that both literary and historical texts are products of the cultural, political, and ideological conditions in which they are produced. Literary works are therefore not merely imaginative creations that reflect history; they are cultural texts that participate in shaping and negotiating historical meaning.

The theoretical foundation of this study is Louis Montrose's influential formulation of the "historicity of texts and the textuality of history." As Montrose explains, "By the historicity of texts, I mean the cultural specificity, the social embedment, of all modes of writing... By the textuality of history, I mean that we can have no access to a full and authentic past... unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question" (20). Montrose's statement highlights two central assumptions of New Historicism. First, literary texts are inseparable from the historical circumstances in which they are produced. Second, history itself is accessible only through texts—such as official reports, memoirs, newspapers, oral traditions, and literary works—which are shaped by particular cultural and ideological perspectives. Rather than privileging one source over another, New Historicism encourages a parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts to achieve a fuller understanding of the past.

Stephen Greenblatt similarly argues that literary works are "the product of a negotiation between a creator... and the institutions and practices of society" (*Learning to Curse* 12). Literature is therefore not an isolated artistic creation but the result of continuous interaction between writers and the social world in which they live. This concept of negotiation is particularly useful for examining Mizo novels written about the Second World War, as they transform historical events into narratives shaped by indigenous experiences and cultural memory.

This perspective is especially relevant to wartime Mizoram. Existing knowledge of the Second World War in the Lushai Hills largely comes from colonial records, military documents, missionary writings, memoirs, and oral testimonies. While these sources provide valuable historical information, they primarily reflect administrative or institutional perspectives. The selected Mizo novels complement these records by preserving everyday experiences, emotional responses, and local interpretations of wartime change. A New Historicist reading therefore places literary texts and historical documents in dialogue rather than treating one as more authoritative than the other.

Following this approach, the present study reads five selected Mizo novels alongside historical sources relating to wartime Mizoram. Instead of asking whether the novels accurately reproduce historical facts, it examines how they reinterpret historical experiences through narrative. Historical records document military recruitment, wartime allowances, road construction, and administrative reforms, whereas the novels reveal how these developments affected ordinary Mizo families, reshaped social relationships, and transformed cultural values. Fiction thus becomes an important historical discourse that complements official history by preserving dimensions of experience often absent from conventional archives.

New Historicism also draws attention to the relationship between power and human agency. Colonial rule transformed Mizoram through military mobilisation, administrative reforms, education, and economic change, but these processes were not experienced uniformly. The selected novels show that Mizo people actively negotiated these changes, adapting new opportunities while preserving elements of their own cultural identity. Military service, for example, broadened educational horizons, encouraged economic mobility, and stimulated political awareness, demonstrating that colonial institutions could produce consequences extending beyond imperial intentions.

Accordingly, this article employs New Historicism as both a theoretical framework and a methodological approach. By reading literary narratives alongside memoirs, historical records, missionary publications, and other contemporary documents, it demonstrates that the selected novels function simultaneously as literary works and historical discourses. They do not simply reflect the history of World War II in Mizoram; they actively reinterpret and preserve it through indigenous perspectives, contributing to the construction of Mizo collective memory.

Historical Context of World War II in Mizoram

The Second World War transformed the Lushai Hills from a remote colonial frontier into an important strategic region of the Allied war effort. Although no major battles were fought within Mizoram, the Japanese advance into Burma in 1942 compelled the British administration to strengthen its military presence throughout the Lushai Hills. Roads were constructed, military camps established, labour corps organised, and thousands of Mizo youths recruited into different branches of the British Indian Army. Consequently, wartime policies reshaped not only military affairs but also the economic, social, and political life of Mizo society.

Before the war, the Mizo economy depended largely on jhum cultivation, while cash transactions remained limited. Describing the traditional economy, K. Zawla notes that mithun, guns, gongs, necklaces, and livestock were widely accepted as media of exchange, indicating that barter continued to dominate everyday economic life (Zawla 104). Similarly, Liangkhaia observes that organised markets and the circulation of money were still in their

early stages, reflecting the largely self-sufficient character of pre-war Mizo society (Liangkhaia 158). These accounts suggest that the colonial monetary economy had only a limited influence before the outbreak of the war.

The wartime situation rapidly altered this economic structure. Military recruitment, road construction, and government allowances introduced unprecedented amounts of cash into the region. Recalling this transformation, Capt. L. Z. Sailo writes, "Even those who went off to the military would send their salaries home to their families every month... The family allotment sent by the government, which their families could readily draw each month, also arrived regularly," (Sailo 12).

This testimony illustrates how wartime policies accelerated the monetisation of Mizo society. Regular salaries and government allowances gradually replaced barter, creating new patterns of consumption and improving household incomes. The economic transformation portrayed in the novels is therefore firmly grounded in historical experience rather than fictional invention.

Military recruitment likewise became one of the most significant consequences of the war. Thousands of Mizo youths joined the Assam Regiment, Medical Corps, Labour Corps, and other military units. As Sailo recalls, "Before the war, not many Mizos enlisted in the Assam Rifles either; it used to be viewed as a job meant for Gurkhas and Nepalis." (Sailo 5) The war fundamentally changed this situation by opening military service to large numbers of Mizo young men. Beyond financial benefits, enlistment exposed them to different societies, languages, and political ideas, experiences that profoundly influenced post-war Mizo society.

The selected novels consistently reconstruct these historical developments through the experiences of ordinary people. Rather than merely repeating official records, they portray how wartime policies affected families, villages, and everyday life. Stephen Greenblatt argues that a literary work is "the product of a negotiation between a creator... and the institutions and practices of society" (*Greenblatt* 12). The wartime novels examined in this study illustrate this negotiation by transforming colonial policies into narratives of indigenous experience. Likewise, Montrose's concept of the "historicity of texts and the textuality of history" helps explain why these novels should be read not simply as fiction but as historical discourses that preserve dimensions of wartime life largely absent from colonial archives.

Historical evidence further indicates that wartime service broadened educational and political horizons. Soldiers travelled beyond the Lushai Hills to Burma, India, and other parts of the British Empire, encountering new administrative systems, modern education, and nationalist movements. Their experiences reshaped ideas about leadership, education, and

social mobility after returning home. Consequently, the Second World War marked a decisive turning point in the transition of Mizo society from relative isolation towards greater engagement with the modern world.

From a New Historicist perspective, these developments reveal that colonial power operated through economic policy, military mobilisation, and administrative institutions rather than military force alone. At the same time, Mizo communities were not passive recipients of colonial rule. They interpreted, adapted, and transformed wartime experiences according to their own cultural realities. The selected novels therefore portray the Second World War as a dynamic historical moment in which colonial authority and indigenous agency continually interacted, producing far-reaching changes in Mizo society.

Economic Transformation: From Subsistence Economy to Monetary Society

One of the most enduring consequences of the Second World War was the transformation of the Mizo economy from a largely subsistence-based system to an increasingly cash-oriented society. Before the war, jhum cultivation formed the basis of everyday life, while money played only a limited role in local transactions. Describing the economic condition of pre-war Mizoram, Vanlalchhunga recalls that even two rupees for land tax was difficult to earn, whereas anyone possessing one hundred rupees was considered exceptionally wealthy (Vanlalchhunga intro viii). His observation illustrates the marginal place of money in the traditional Mizo economy.

The war fundamentally altered this economic structure. Military recruitment, road construction, government allowances, and wage labour introduced regular cash income into villages on an unprecedented scale. Capt. L. Z. Sailo records that soldiers regularly remitted part of their salaries to their families, while households and village chiefs also received wartime allowances (Sailo 12). Church records likewise note a marked increase in tithes and offerings during and after the war, reflecting the wider circulation of money within Mizo society. Together, these historical sources demonstrate that the wartime economy accelerated the transition from barter to a monetary economy.

The selected novels vividly reconstruct this transformation through the experiences of ordinary people. In Awi Karei Lucknow, "The soldiers knew that they would be able to support their families financially. Consequently, during the years 1940–1946, a remarkably large number of Mizo young men enlisted in the army." (Sailo 9) This observation demonstrates that military enlistment was motivated not only by loyalty to the British Empire but also by the desire to secure economic stability for one's family. From a New Historicist perspective, colonial military recruitment was reinterpreted by the Mizos as an opportunity for economic advancement. Rather than functioning solely as an imperial policy, military service became an indigenous strategy for survival, social mobility, and family responsibility.

Another novel, *Ka Hmangaih Tlat Che*, the protagonist explains his decision to enlist, “I have a mother who has struggled hard to support me. I do not think I can make her life easier if I remain home; therefore, I joined the army.” (Lalruali 3)

Capt. L. Z. Sailo similarly observes that economic responsibility became one of the principal motivations for military enlistment: "The soldiers knew that they would be able to support their families financially. Consequently, during the years 1940–1946, a remarkably large number of Mizo young men enlisted in the army" (Sailo 9). This observation reinforces the novel's portrayal of enlistment as an economic necessity rather than merely an expression of loyalty to the British Empire. From a New Historicist perspective, colonial military recruitment was reinterpreted by the Mizos as an opportunity to improve family welfare and achieve economic security.

Capt. L. Z. Sailo records that "From Lucknow, many young men began sending money home to support their families" (Sailo 12). Likewise, Khawlkungi records a soldier writing home, "Even now, he said, 'I have sent you 100...', assuring his family that regular remittances would continue even while he remained overseas. Together, these literary representations demonstrate that wartime salaries connected distant military camps with village households and accelerated the transition from a subsistence economy to a cash-based economy.

The remittance represents more than financial assistance; it symbolises the emergence of new family relationships sustained through cash income earned far from home. Money now linked distant battlefields with village households, reshaping patterns of responsibility, expectation, and economic security.

Another novel states, *"From Lucknow, many young men began sending money home to support their families."* (Sailo 12) This statement illustrates how wartime salaries transformed relationships between soldiers and their households. Military income connected distant military camps with village communities through regular remittances, strengthening family welfare and accelerating the transition from a subsistence economy to a monetary economy. Read alongside the selected novels, this quotation confirms that economic transformation was experienced as a lived social reality rather than merely an administrative policy.

Historical evidence confirms these literary representations. Besides military salaries, wartime employment created new opportunities through transport construction, salvage work, and trade. Vanlalchhunga records that some individuals accumulated considerable wealth by recovering materials from crashed aircraft and abandoned military vehicles, while others profited from wartime commerce (Laitanga 160). Such developments introduced new forms of wealth and social mobility previously unknown in Mizo society.

From a New Historicist perspective, these changes reveal that colonial economic policies generated consequences extending beyond their original military objectives. Stephen Greenblatt argues that literary works emerge through a "negotiation" between individuals and the institutions of society (Greenblatt 12). The selected novels exemplify this process by transforming colonial economic policies into narratives of aspiration, sacrifice, and family responsibility. They demonstrate that wartime economic change was not simply imposed by colonial authority but actively interpreted and adapted by Mizo communities according to their own social and cultural values.

Taken together, the literary and historical texts show that the monetisation of Mizo society was one of the most enduring legacies of the Second World War. While official records document salaries, allowances, and employment, the novels reveal how these changes transformed everyday life, family relationships, and social values. They therefore function not merely as fictional accounts but as important historical discourses that preserve the lived experience of economic transformation in wartime Mizoram.

Social Transformation: Negotiating Everyday Life under Wartime Colonialism

Beyond its economic impact, the Second World War profoundly reshaped the social life of the Mizo people. Military mobilisation altered education, family life, gender relations, religion, and community values, while exposing local communities to new cultures and institutions. Whereas official records primarily document administrative and military developments, the selected Mizo novels reveal how ordinary people experienced these changes in their daily lives. Read through a New Historicist perspective, these narratives preserve the social memory of wartime Mizoram by recording experiences largely absent from colonial archives.

One of the most visible changes was the arrival of soldiers from different parts of the British Empire. Military camps established across the Lushai Hills transformed previously homogeneous communities into spaces of cultural encounter. Khawlkungi vividly records this experience, "In Aizawl, soldiers had become incredibly numerous; British soldiers, Rajputs, Burmese, and Karens were now scattered all over the place. They couldn't even go to school anymore," (43). This passage illustrates not merely the presence of foreign troops but the disruption of everyday civilian life. Schools were occupied for military purposes, and normal educational activities were suspended. Historical records likewise confirm that public buildings were requisitioned during the war. The novel therefore complements official history by revealing how military policy affected ordinary communities.

Paradoxically, while the war disrupted formal education, it also encouraged new educational aspirations. In *Irrawady Lui Kamah*, an officer advises Thanzinga, "Thank you so much! You recognize my capability and efficiency. Therefore, as soon as a good vacancy opens up, I will give you a promotion/bonus right away." (32). The passage reflects the growing importance of English education in wartime society. Rather than functioning solely

as a colonial language, English became a means of social mobility and professional advancement. Through a New Historicist lens, colonial education emerges as a site of negotiation where imperial institutions created opportunities that Mizo individuals appropriated for their own advancement.

The novels also preserve the psychological atmosphere created by the constant threat of Japanese invasion. In *Maymyo Sanapui*, Capt. C. Khuma describes the panic caused by repeated air-raid warnings, "...the sirens began to wail loudly once again, and people scrambled frantically in search of bomb shelters... I said, 'If the Japanese capture Burma, we won't be able to live the way we intend to.'" (186, 187).

Although the Japanese army never occupied the Lushai Hills, fear itself became a powerful social reality. These emotional experiences are largely absent from official military reports but remain vividly preserved in literary memory, demonstrating what Montrose describes as the "historicity of texts and the textuality of history."

Gender relations likewise underwent significant change during the war. Khawlkungi observes, "There were no loose or desperate women around either. What with the fear of the Japanese enemy, and the fear of the soldiers, they could not live in peace or feel safe at all." (46).

Wartime contact also introduced new forms of courtship and material culture. In *Ka Hmangaih Tlat Che*, Sanga presents Thanpuii with imported gifts, saying, "I have brought you this perfume. The girls of Thuangzawl have probably never seen such a fine perfume" (*Lalruali* 49). The novel further notes that he gave her "a beautiful silk cloth" and "a ring with a red stone" (*Lalruali* 39). Such gifts were uncommon in pre-war Mizo society and symbolise the arrival of foreign consumer goods through wartime mobility. Read from a New Historicist perspective, these objects demonstrate how colonial contact transformed intimate social relationships and introduced new expressions of affection, prestige, and modernity.

The overwhelming presence of soldiers created new anxieties for women and challenged established social norms. Rather than presenting these developments simply as moral decline, the novels portray them as consequences of rapid wartime change, where traditional communal values were forced to adjust to an unfamiliar colonial environment.

Another important transformation concerned the changing social status of soldiers. Before the war, military service was relatively uncommon among the Mizos; during the conflict, however, soldiers came to symbolise honour, education, and economic success. Khawlkungi portrays returning servicemen as respected members of society, while Capt. C. Khuma suggests that the military uniform itself became a symbol of prestige and admiration. Historical accounts similarly note that many returning soldiers later assumed leadership roles within their communities.

In the Novel of *Awii Karei Lucknow*, "Those who went to fight the Japanese came to enjoy a higher social status than ordinary people. If they returned safely after the war, they were regarded as people who had seen the wider world and possessed greater knowledge. Young women, in particular, admired them greatly. Wherever they went, they received respect from the people, and some even became proud of their elevated status." (Sailo 8) This passage demonstrates that military service transformed social status within Mizo society. Uniform and wartime experience became symbols of prestige, leadership, and modernity. Read through a New Historicist lens, colonial military institutions unintentionally created new forms of indigenous social authority based upon experience rather than hereditary privilege. From a New Historicist perspective, this shift represented more than changing occupations. Colonial military institutions unintentionally redistributed social prestige by creating new forms of authority based on education, professional achievement, and wartime experience rather than hereditary status alone. Stephen Greenblatt's concept of negotiation is particularly useful here: colonial institutions sought to strengthen imperial control, yet they simultaneously produced indigenous leaders who reshaped post-war Mizo society according to local aspirations.

The war also transformed family life by separating young men from their households for prolonged periods. In *Ka Hmangaih Tlat Che*, one character explains, "For poor people like us, joining the Assam Regiment seemed to be the only path towards a better future" (Lalruali 3). He further says, "Like you, I have a mother who has struggled hard to raise me. I do not think I can make her life easier if I remain at home, so I decided to join the army" (Lalruali 3). These passages reveal that enlistment was accompanied by emotional sacrifice. While military service offered economic opportunity, it also disrupted traditional family structures. From a New Historicist perspective, colonial wartime institutions reshaped domestic life by creating new patterns of migration, separation, and responsibility.

The war also affected religious and family life. Missionary activities were interrupted, villages lost large numbers of young men to military service, and many families endured prolonged uncertainty regarding their loved ones. James Dokhuma poignantly compares young women returning from farewell gatherings to mourners returning from a funeral, capturing the emotional burden borne by civilian communities throughout the conflict. Such experiences rarely appear in official records but occupy a central place in literary narratives.

Taken together, the selected novels demonstrate that the Second World War transformed Mizo society far beyond the battlefield. Schools, churches, families, gender relations, and social hierarchies all underwent significant change as colonial wartime policies intersected with indigenous life. By preserving these everyday experiences, the novels function not only as literary works but also as valuable historical discourses, revealing dimensions of wartime Mizoram that remain only partially visible in colonial archives.

Political Consciousness and the Emergence of Modern Mizo Identity

One of the most enduring consequences of the Second World War was the emergence of a new political consciousness among the Mizo people. Although colonial administration had introduced modern institutions before the war, political participation remained limited. Wartime military service, increased mobility, and contact with people from different parts of India and the British Empire exposed many Mizos to new ideas of nationalism, democracy, and self-government. Consequently, the selected novels portray the war not simply as a military conflict but as a turning point in the political transformation of Mizo society.

Historical evidence indicates that military service fundamentally broadened the outlook of Mizo soldiers. Living and working alongside people from different regions enabled them to compare their own society with wider political and social developments.

The ideological complexity of wartime service is clearly illustrated in *Irrawady Lui Kamah*. When members of the Indian National Army invite him to join their struggle, the protagonist reflects, "The INA invited us to surrender to the Japanese and join them in the struggle for India's independence. However, when I reflected on the oath of loyalty I had taken upon joining the army, I felt that surrender would be a serious betrayal" (Dokhuma 41). Rather than presenting political identity as fixed, the novel portrays the competing claims of imperial loyalty and Indian nationalism. This tension reflects a central concern of New Historicism, which emphasises that individuals negotiate multiple and often conflicting ideological positions. Reflecting on this transformation, R. Vanlawma writes:

The reason why Mizos gathered together from different hilly areas was because they had a strong mindset of Mizo national mentality. One of the most important factors in this development was Indopui I and II. In that war, they learned everything from the wiser nations and how they protected and developed their motherlands. In the 1940s and 1950s, Mizo began to understand their tribe and enjoyed being Mizo. (5–6)

Vanlawma's observation suggests that the war did more than expand geographical horizons; it strengthened a collective awareness of belonging to a wider Mizo community. From a New Historicist perspective, colonial military institutions unintentionally created conditions that encouraged the growth of indigenous political consciousness. The very structures established to strengthen imperial rule became spaces in which new political ideas circulated among the colonised.

The selected novels reinforce this historical reality by portraying returning soldiers as agents of social and political change. Military service exposed them to new administrative systems, organisational discipline, and leadership practices, experiences that later enhanced their influence within village communities. Rather than presenting soldiers merely as participants in war, the novels depict them as mediators between colonial modernity and indigenous society. Literature thus complements historical records by illustrating how

political awareness developed through lived experience rather than abstract political ideology.

Khawlkungi's account of the public gathering held on 3 April 1942, when the Union Jack was ceremonially raised before local leaders pledged support for the Allied war effort, illustrates the symbolic operation of colonial authority. The ceremony sought to reinforce imperial loyalty through public ritual and political spectacle. Yet its significance extended beyond British intentions. Read through a New Historicist lens, the event became a site where Mizo people also reflected upon leadership, collective responsibility, and their own place within a rapidly changing political world. Colonial discourse was therefore negotiated rather than passively accepted.

Capt. L. Z. Sailo similarly observes that "The chiefs became determined to defend Mizoram against the Japanese. It was no longer only the soldiers who fought the war; the people of Mizoram also regarded it as their own responsibility" (Sailo 123). This passage demonstrates how a global imperial conflict came to be understood as the defence of the homeland. Colonial military objectives were therefore reinterpreted through indigenous ideas of collective responsibility and community survival.

Another important consequence of wartime mobilisation was the gradual decline of the traditional chieftainship as the sole centre of authority. Returning soldiers, teachers, interpreters, and government employees possessed educational qualifications, administrative experience, and linguistic skills that increasingly challenged hereditary leadership. As Lalhmuaka observes, wartime experiences weakened unquestioned loyalty towards traditional chiefs and created favourable conditions for organised political movements, culminating in the establishment of the Mizo Union. Political authority gradually shifted from hereditary privilege towards leadership based on education, experience, and public participation.

The selected novels subtly reflect this transition. Characters who return from military service are portrayed as individuals whose authority derives from knowledge, discipline, and experience rather than inherited status. Their encounters with different societies encourage them to question existing social structures while imagining new possibilities for their own community. These literary representations reveal what Stephen Greenblatt describes as the circulation of social energy, whereby ideas generated within colonial institutions are appropriated and transformed within indigenous society. Power, therefore, is shown not as fixed but as continually negotiated between colonial authority and local agency.

The war also contributed significantly to the emergence of a modern Mizo identity. Before the twentieth century, loyalty was often centred on individual villages or chiefly territories. Wartime recruitment brought together young men from different parts of the

Lushai Hills under shared training, common hardships, and collective military experience. These encounters fostered a broader sense of belonging that transcended local identities. The selected novels repeatedly portray this shared experience through friendship, sacrifice, and collective memory, suggesting that the Second World War became an important chapter in the making of modern Mizoram. The novels also connect wartime courage with the traditional Mizo ideal of *tlawmngaihna*¹. Describing the bravery of Mizo soldiers, Capt. C. Khuma writes: "With the spirit of Mizo *tlawmngaihna*, they advanced fearlessly. Rather than abandoning the bodies of their comrades, they were willing even to sacrifice their own lives. Whenever one brave soldier fell, another stepped forward to take his place" (Khuma 209). This passage suggests that military heroism was understood not simply as a product of colonial discipline but as an extension of indigenous ethical values. A New Historicist reading therefore reveals that modern Mizo identity emerged through the interaction of colonial military structures and traditional cultural ideals.

From a New Historicist perspective, political transformation in wartime Mizoram cannot be explained through colonial policy alone. It emerged through the interaction of military institutions, missionary education, indigenous leadership, historical experience, and literary representation. By preserving these multiple voices, the selected novels do more than recount political change; they participate in constructing the collective memory through which modern Mizo identity continues to be understood. They therefore stand not only as literary achievements but also as important historical discourses that illuminate the political legacy of the Second World War.

Discussion: Negotiating Colonial Power and Historical Memory

The analysis demonstrates that the selected Mizo novels function as more than fictional narratives; they are important cultural texts that reinterpret the historical experience of the Second World War. Read alongside memoirs, colonial records, and missionary writings, the novels reveal the reciprocal relationship between literature and history that lies at the heart of New Historicism. Rather than merely reflecting historical events, they actively participate in constructing historical meaning through indigenous perspectives.

One of the major contributions of these novels is their representation of everyday wartime experience. Official records document military recruitment, road construction, government allowances, and administrative reforms, but they reveal little about how these changes affected ordinary families. The novels bridge this gap by portraying separation, fear, economic hardship, and changing social relationships. In doing so, they preserve dimensions of history that remain largely invisible within colonial archives.

This relationship illustrates Stephen Greenblatt's concept of the circulation of social energy, whereby ideas, values, and institutions move continuously between society and literature.

¹ *Tlawmngaihna*: A core Mizo ethical concept referring to self-sacrifice, altruism, and voluntary service for the welfare of the community, performed without expectation of personal gain.

Wartime policies introduced by the colonial administration were transformed within the novels into narratives of family responsibility, social mobility, education, and political awakening. Fiction therefore becomes a medium through which historical experience is interpreted and transmitted across generations.

The study also reveals the paradoxical nature of colonial power. British wartime policies strengthened imperial administration through military mobilisation, bureaucratic expansion, and economic reform. Yet these same policies unintentionally encouraged new forms of indigenous agency. Military service widened educational horizons, strengthened economic independence, and exposed Mizo youths to ideas of leadership and nationalism. As Greenblatt's concept of subversion and containment suggests, colonial institutions simultaneously reinforced imperial authority and created conditions that enabled social and political transformation.

The selected novels consistently portray Mizo people as active participants rather than passive recipients of colonial rule. Characters enlist in the army to support their families, pursue education, or seek new opportunities, thereby reshaping colonial institutions according to local aspirations. Read through a New Historicist perspective, these narratives demonstrate that wartime Mizoram was a dynamic space where colonial authority and indigenous agency continuously negotiated one another.

Taken together, the five novels constitute a literary archive of wartime Mizoram. Published between 1946 and 1997, they preserve diverse memories of the Second World War while collectively constructing the cultural memory of modern Mizoram. Their significance therefore extends beyond literature, offering valuable historical insight into the social, economic, and political transformation of Mizo society.

Conclusion

The Second World War marked a decisive turning point in the history of modern Mizoram. Although the Lushai Hills did not become a major battlefield, wartime policies profoundly transformed the region's economy, society, and political consciousness. Military recruitment, expanding monetary circulation, infrastructural development, and increased contact with the wider world accelerated changes that continued to shape Mizo society long after the war.

Through a New Historicist reading of *Maymyo Sanapui*, *Irrawady Lui Kamah*, *Zawlpala Thlan Tlang*, *Ka Hmangaih Tlat Che*, and *Awi Ka Rei Lucknow*, this study has shown that these novels are more than fictional representations of wartime experience. They reinterpret historical events through indigenous perspectives and preserve forms of memory often absent from official colonial records. Read alongside memoirs, government documents, missionary writings, and oral accounts, they reveal how ordinary Mizo people understood, negotiated, and responded to the profound transformations brought about by the war.

The study further demonstrates that literature occupies an important place in the reconstruction of history. The selected novels document not only economic change, social transformation, and political awakening but also the emotional experiences and cultural memories through which these historical processes continue to be understood. In this sense, they function simultaneously as literary works and historical discourses.

Ultimately, this article argues that a New Historicist reading broadens our understanding of wartime Mizoram by placing literary texts and historical documents in dialogue. Such an approach reveals that the history of the Second World War survives not only in official archives but also in the collective memory preserved through Mizo literature. The selected novels therefore remain indispensable sources for understanding both the historical transformation of Mizoram and the emergence of modern Mizo identity.

Works Cited

- Dokhuma, James. Irrawady Lui Kamah. R. Lalrawna. 1982.
 Khawlkungi. Zawlpala Thlan Tlang. R. Lalremruati. 1983.
 Khuma, Capt. C. Maymyo Sanapui. Rev Dr. Zairema leh Capt. C. Khuma Hnuhma, edited by B. Lalthangliana, RTM Press. 2005.
 Lalruali. Ka Hmangaih Tlat Che. The Synod Publications & Literature Board. 1991.
 Sailo, Capt. L. Z. Awi Ka Rei Lucknow. Lengchhawn Press.1997.
 Greenblatt, Stephen. Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture. Routledge, 1990.
 Greenblatt, Stephen. Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare. University of Chicago Press, 1980.
 Laitanga, C. Mizo Khua. Mizoram Publication Board. 2002.
 Lalhmuaka. Zoram Thim Ata Engah. Synod Publication Board, 1988.
 Liangkhaia. Mizo Chanchin. LTL Publications, 2011.
 Montrose, Louis A. "Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture." The New Historicism, edited by H. Aram Veenser, Routledge, 1989.
 Vanlawma, R. Laisuih. MC Lalrinthanga, 2007.
 Veenser, H. Aram, editor. The New Historicism. Routledge, 1989.
 Zawla, K. Mizo Pi Pute leh An Thlahte Chanchin. Lalnipuii, 2001.